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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: RRT ERBIL: PUK PLENUM - WOOING THE DISAFFECTED
WHILE BLASTING NAWSHIRWAN

Classified By: RRT Erbil Team Leader Andrew Snow for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (U) This is an RRT Erbil cable.

[1](#)2. (C) Summary: The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) political party held its first party plenum since 2006 on October 29-31 with the goal of reinvigorating the party and increasing party unity in the lead up to the national elections in January. The party decided to wait until a spring 2010 PUK conference to fill leadership vacancies created when key PUK leaders resigned to form the Goran (Change) Movement. The formation of two new bodies within the party will promote reform and reduce opportunities for corruption. Halo Ibrahim Ahmed, brother to First Lady Hero Talabani said that the plenum was unprecedented in the opportunity it provided its membership to openly criticize the leadership. Harsh accusations against Goran leader Nawshirwan Mustafa peppered President Talabani,s main address; Goran,s private reaction was predictably strong. End Summary.

Plenum Brings Modest Reforms:

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[1](#)3. (C) The PUK wrapped up a three-day plenum on October 31, the first one since 2006, which was described as a precursor to a larger PUK party conference tentatively slated for April or May 2010. The last PUK party conference was held in 2001 and was only its second since the party was founded in the mid 1970,s. As described to Sulaimaniyah IPAO by Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Vice President and PUK First Deputy Secretary General Kosrat Rasoul, the conference will feature elections for the 35-member leadership council from which the 11-member politburo will be chosen. There will be a separate ballot to elect the secretary general. Rasoul said that 1,500 people attended the plenum, including 130 from the Kurdish diaspora. He said that although up to one-third of the politburo may be replaced at a plenum, this time none of the vacancies, created when four of the politburo members resigned to lead the Goran Movement, were filled. The leadership decided to postpone filling the vacancies until the spring conference. Media reports claimed that Rasoul,s faction within the party wanted to fill the vacancies despite Iraqi President and PUK Secretary General Jalal Talabani,s preference to wait. However, Rasoul was tight-lipped about any daylight between him and Talabani.

[1](#)4. (C) Rasoul described two structural changes decided at the plenum: 1) formation of an integrity committee comprising at least seven PUK members who are all judges, and 2) formation of an 80-member body to advise on internal policy. Rasoul said that the Integrity Committee will have the authority to document and verify personal assets and sources of income of the leadership, starting right at the top with President Talabani. Rasoul said that PUK needed to take advantage of the professional and technical expertise of its members, and

thereby formed an advisory body to the politburo. Rasoul said that the impetus for these changes within PUK was the growing realization that the Kurdish street wants to see reform. He said that this renewed focus on reform pre-dated -- and was not linked to -- the emergence of Goran. He cautioned however, that the pace of change needs to be managed and that at times some forms of leadership discretion need to be accepted temporarily. Unity was an important theme of the plenum as all PUK politburo members were required to sign a "Pact of Honor" pledging to safeguard PUK unity.

Wooring Voters Back to the PUK Fold

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15. (C) Rasoul said that in addition to a renewed effort to provide an increased level of essential services to the people, there was a major push underway to attract back voters who had left the party to support Goran. Halo Ibrahim Ahmed, PUK member turned independent KRG presidential candidate who now has returned to the PUK, indicated he has the lead on efforts to woo wayward voters back into the PUK fold. Halo said that President Talabani has authorized him to encourage those who are considering returning to PUK to do so. He claimed that by PUK,s count, approximately 2,000 Goran supporters had already asked to rejoin the PUK. Ahmed said that the party has given him resources to provide financial assistance to those who return and opportunities for employment. He said there were also breakaway voters from Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) who are having difficulty being accepted back into KDP, so he is reaching out to them as well. Ahmed said that KDP has tolerated

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members who leave their party and become supporters of PUK, since they still support the KDP-PUK alliance.

Criticism of Leadership, but Talabani Strengthened:
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16. (C) Ahmed said that the PUK rank and file had never before been as free to criticize the party as they were during this plenum. Among those who presented criticism was Hakim Qadir, head of the PUK Assayesh in Sulaimaniyah. One politburo member expressed displeasure at PUK,s acceptance of Goran voters back into the party and PUK,s provision of financial assistance to them. Ahmed said that President Talabani was pleased to hear the complaints because most of the criticism was directed at the politburo leadership and did not stick to him, because members understand that he has been busy in Baghdad. Ahmed reported that Talabani was seen to provide fresh momentum to the PUK and emerged from the plenum in a stronger position. He said that Talabani had sensed PUK disarray and now felt more confident that the situation was under control. Ahmed went on to say that Talabani now feels more comfortable to consider another term as Iraqi President. On November 10, Talabani,s Advisors Aram Yarwessi and Mamand Rasoul echoed Ahmed,s analysis that the establishment of a PUK Council charged with oversight strengthened Talabani and dispelled complaints from PUK defectors that party reform would never happen under his guise.

Mam Jalal Blasts Nawshirwan
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17. (SBU) Media reports of President Talabani,s primary address to the PUK membership focused on sharp accusations leveled against Goran Movement and its head, Nawshirwan Mustafa. Talabani accused Mustafa of ordering the assassination of public figures during the 1980,s. He told the PUK membership that Mustafa was the one who had ordered Peshmerga units to coordinate with Iranian Pasdaran units to attack Iraqi army units in Halabja, later leading to Saddam,s chemical attack. Talabani accused Mustafa of using the USD 10 million Talabani had given him that was intended

to establish a cultural center to begin "shooting at the PUK." Talabani accused Goran of being against federalism, against Kirkuk being part of the Kurdistan Region, and against the unification of the Peshmerga forces.

An Outside Perspective from Former PUK Insiders:

18. (SBU) Formerly London-based Goran Movement leader and Nawshirwan confidant Shores Haji told IPAO of Goran's offense at Talabani's accusations. As someone who was physically present with Nawshirwan throughout the 1980's, including during Saddam's Anfal campaign against the Kurds, Haji answered Talabani's accusations saying, "Talabani is attempting to rewrite history though he was not even in Kurdistan at the time but was traveling between regional and European capitals." Haji said that Talabani's attempt to pin responsibility for acts of violence in the 1980's solely on Mustafa is already coming back to bite him. According to Haji, the public and even some within PUK are beginning to question the logic of Talabani's claims, wondering whether Talabani was really in charge during the 1980's. "Decisions on actions that were carried out must have come from the top, but was Talabani not really at the top?" is the question on people's minds, said Haji. He explained that Talabani's accusation that Mustafa wanted to give up at that time and encouraged others to do the same was absolutely false. He said that following Anfal, it was Mustafa who regrouped Qsai that following Anfal, it was Mustafa who regrouped Peshmerga troops, reorganized them into fighting units, redeployed them across the region, and later led the uprising of 1991. He said it was Mustafa who was in communication with Masoud Barzani during this time, and it was he who convinced Barzani to mobilize and support the uprising. Haji again stressed that Talabani was nowhere to be seen during this time. Talabani's claim that Mustafa-led Peshmerga troops, fight to dislodge the Iraqi Army from Halabja led to the chemical attack on Halabja is "unconscionable", Haji said. "He is essentially saying that Nawshirwan gave Saddam the reason he needed to hit Halabja and Nawshirwan is therefore responsible for the deaths of the Halabjans."

19. (C) Haji said that Kosrat Rasoul and his supporters had been in a position to shift the balance of power within the PUK, but were successfully parried by Talabani. (Note: Haji says that he has been close to Rasoul over the years and that he still speaks with him occasionally. He also said that throughout the plenum he received calls from PUK members telling him they were uncomfortable with some of the statements coming out of the leadership, especially from

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Talabani. End Note) Haji said that with about half of the 1,500 members at the plenum behind Rasoul and in favor of filling the leadership vacancies, had Rasoul been successful at this attempt to stack the politburo, he would have been in a position of much greater strength. Talabani has wearied of Rasoul, Haji said, but needs him and his supporters through the election. However, following the elections, there may be movement within PUK to cut Rasoul loose; "Rasoul has cost Talabani too much money over the years," Haji said. "Even though I consider Kosrat a friend, he just can't let go of the material benefits that have come to him and his family from his relationship with PUK."

Comment:
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110. (C) Although power struggles within the PUK have been tamped down for now, they still smolder under the surface. President Talabani has put the PUK house in order for now and has focused the membership on the task at hand: the national elections. However post-elections, there will be much jockeying for power within the PUK in the lead-up to the spring PUK conference. If Goran has a strong showing in the national elections, the added pressure of another electoral

setback may hit the PUK leadership especially hard. This scenario could provide the excuse Talabani may be looking for to edge out Kosrat Rasoul and his closest allies, thereby consolidating his hold on the PUK. Although Talabani,s accusations against Nawshirwan Mustafa may resonate for some, there are too many people who were eyewitnesses to events of the 1980,s who are still active and understand that he may be twisting PUK and Kurdish history to suit his own political purposes. Talabani will not likely get as much mileage out of the accusations as he initially may have hoped.

HILL